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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003578

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TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: LEE SWEEPS ALL REGIONS EXCEPT JEOLLA

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: December 19, Lee Myung-bak was elected President of Korea with 48.6 percent of the vote. Second place went to Chung Dong-young with 26.3 percent while Lee Hoi-chang came in third with 15.1 percent. Lee Myung-bak was the first conservative candidate since direct elections were re-instituted in 1987 to carry the capital region, and he received the highest ever conservative support in the southwest Jeolla Provinces. End Summary

Number Crunching

¶2. (U) Of the over 37 million who were eligible to vote, 23.68 million or 62.9 percent voted, despite December 19

being a national holiday. It was the lowest turnout for a direct presidential election. Boosting the number eligible, the legal voting age was lowered from 20 to 19. Absentee voting for Koreans overseas is not yet allowed for those other than diplomats and soldiers, but there are plans to expand rights for those overseas in 2008.

¶3. (SBU) The largest gap between Lee Myung-bak and Chung Dong-young was in the Gyeongsang Provinces (Gyeongsang vote totals below) and Chung received his greatest support in Gwangju and Jeolla Provinces (Gwangju vote totals below). A breakdown of the vote in some key regions, by percentage and vote total:

	LMB	CDY	LHC
Overall	48.5 (10,983,363)	26.3 (5,965,798)	15.1 (3,419,149)
Seoul	53.2 (2,424,927)	24.6 (1,119,897)	11.8 (536,053)
Gwangju	8.6 (56,875)	79.8 (527,588)	3.4 (22,520)
Gyeongbuk	72.6 (1,020,377)	6.8 (95,422)	13.7 (192,506)
Chungnam	34.3 (313,689)	21.1 (192,989)	33.2 (304,246)
Chungbuk	41.6 (289,453)	23.8 (165,613)	23.4 (162,719)
Busan	57.9 (1,018,715)	13.5 (236,708)	19.7 (346,319)
Gyeonggi	51.8	23.6	13.4

Regionalism - Not Dead Yet?

¶4. (SBU) While Lee Myung-bak hoped to break 10 percent in Gwangju and Jeolla Provinces as a symbol that his candidacy was above regionalism, he failed to do so. However, he did receive the highest vote total ever for a conservative candidate in the liberal stronghold. Also, Chung failed to receive over 80 percent support in Jeolla, a region that gave Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun over 90 percent support. Most pundits admit that regionalism is still alive and well, but the fact that many voters in Seoul with family ties in Jeolla Provinces did not vote along regional lines shows that regionalism's effect, at least in the capital region, is on the wane.

¶5. (SBU) The roughly 85 percent of the vote the two conservative candidates Lee Myung-bak and Lee Hoi-chang received in Gyeongbuk Province showed two things: first that regionalism is not dead and many still vote along regional lines; and second that Park Geun-hye secured many votes for Lee Myung-bak. When Lee Hoi-chang first entered the race in November, he led Lee Myung-bak in polls in the most conservative province in Korea thanks to his far-right platform. However, once Park Geun-hye started campaigning for Lee Myung-bak in the region in late November, support swung from Lee Hoi-chang to Lee Myung-bak.

¶6. (C) Still, Lee Hoi-chang had a respectable showing at 15 percent of the total vote. Particularly impressive was his strong showing in the Chungcheong region, coming close to winning the province. Lee Hoi-chang is certain to inaugurate his own political party with Chungcheong and conservative roots, much like Kim Jong-pil did over the past twenty years.

The Also-Rans

¶7. (SBU) Independent candidate Moon Kuk-hyun garnered 5.8 percent of the vote and Democratic Labor Party (DLP) candidate Kwon Young-ghil received just 3.0 percent. Rhee In-je, who won 19.2 percent of the vote in 1997 after splitting from the GNP and forming his own party, received a meager 0.7 percent of the vote. Moon's paltry showing does not augur well for his chances to form a party and field competitive candidates in the April 9 National Assembly election. He may instead choose to join forces with the UNDP. Also, Kwon's DLP could have a difficult time maintaining its 8 proportional seats in the assembly; a party must receive at least 5 percent support to obtain any proportional seats. There were a record 12 candidates in 2007 who paid the 500 million won (540,000 USD) to enter the race.

Comment

¶8. (C) The 2007 election results show clear support for Lee Myung-bak in almost every region and every age or gender category. However, regionalism remains alive and well as evidenced by his single-digit support in Jeolla Provinces and enormous support for the two Lees in the Gyeongsang Provinces. So, as before, the place of birth is by far the most important determinant of how one will vote. Lee, as the beloved ex-Mayor, is fortunate that Seoul voters, many of whom have no regional roots, are now the biggest voting bloc. This helped dilute regionalism's effect in Seoul and led to his commanding victory.

VERSHBOW